

Perish 516

Chapter 516: Catiline

Seeing Cato, the older generation of Rome's aristocrats, who were in agony over their own corruption, were greatly encouraged, believing him to be the hope of the republic. After his term as Financial Officer, they enthusiastically welcomed him into the Senate.

Caesar was neat and fashionable, leading the trend; Cato was unkempt and slovenly. Caesar loved luxurious competitions and performances, spending lavishly, whereas Cato was very frugal, extremely harsh on himself... Both of them established unique images and won widespread recognition and fame among the people of Rome.

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Less than a year after the peace treaty between the Nix Tribe and the Pannonians, envoys from three major Pannonian tribes once again sought an audience with Maximus, proposing a new request: they hoped to form an alliance with the Nix Tribe to jointly resist the Boyi people.

Their reasoning was: the Boyi people are powerful, fierce, and greedy. Once the Pannonian tribes are defeated by them, they will not stop their invasion. At that time, tens of thousands of Boyi warriors would flood into the territory of the Nix. Without lips, the teeth feel the cold; therefore, the Nix Tribe and the Pannonian tribes must unite to ensure the security of their own territories!

Despite the envoy's eloquence, Maximus firmly refused the Pannonians' request.

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In 63 BC (the tenth year of the Nix Tribe), Cicero and Hibriida officially became Governor.

Immediately, a People's Guardian named Lulus proposed a radical Land Bill, demanding the large-scale distribution of land to impoverished citizens, starting with the state-owned lands of Campania.

This bill couldn't solve the current issue of the large numbers of landless vagrants in Rome, but it could ease the problem, so all ten People's Guardians supported the bill, and Crassus and Caesar were active supporters of Lulus as well.

Pompey's attitude was harder to discern.

On one hand, his military campaigns were nearing completion. With a large number of veterans needing resettlement on their return, this Land Bill might provide them with farmland.

On the other hand, if Crassus played a critical role in this plan, it would mean these veterans and many other citizens would owe him a favor, which also meant Pompey would owe Crassus a favor. Therefore, Pompey refrained from making an explicit statement.

However, many important Elders opposed Lulus' proposal. Though Cicero, who had just become Governor but had a relatively weak political foundation, saw this as a good opportunity to win them over. He delivered a series of speeches to the Senate and the people, ultimately achieving victory, leading to the abandonment of the Land Bill.

A disappointed Caesar subsequently prosecuted Piso, the recently resigned Provincial Governor of Northern Italy, but Piso's defense lawyer was Cicero, and once again, Caesar wasn't successful. However, his efforts on behalf of the people of Inner Gaul raised his prestige among the people of Northern Italy.

Immediately after, Caesar, cooperating seamlessly with one of the People's Guardians, Labienus, prosecuted an elderly and mediocre Elder, Rabirius, for killing the People's Guardian Saturninus thirty-seven years ago. Under Roman law, "the People's Guardian is sacred and inviolable," thus he was charged with treason.

Caesar, along with his distant cousin (also named Caesar), was randomly chosen to be the two judges for this case.

Rabirius was found guilty, with the penalty being death.

He was allowed to appeal to the Hundred People Meeting representing the people of Rome. Cicero and Hortensius defended him, but they seemed unable to reverse the verdict. Just as Rabirius was about to be found guilty, an incident brought the trial to an abrupt halt.

According to tradition, the Hundred People Meeting convened on the War God Square, while a sentry was placed at a vantage point on the nearby Janiculum Mountain. The sentry would hoist a red flag at the mountain's peak, allowing the Hundred People Meeting to continue their sessions and handle affairs. If the flag was lowered, it indicated Rome was in danger, and citizens would have to immediately disband the meeting and take up arms to prepare for battle. This custom persisted into this era.

Just before the Hundred People Meeting concluded the voting that would decide Rabirius' fate, the Legal Officer overseeing the meeting, Metellus, quietly sent someone to lower the flag on the mountain, causing the meeting to adjourn without a verdict.

Caesar and Labienus were both very willing to drop the investigation after the fact. Obviously, Caesar was not genuinely intending to convict and execute an aged elder. His main goal was to appear in such an important gathering, standing in line with public sentiment.

So, later in the year, another meeting of the Hundred People Meeting elected him to be a Legal Officer for the following year.

In Rome, the position of Legal Officer is one of the most important roles, second only to that of Governor. Upon the end of their term, as long as the individual desires, they are sure to receive a Provincial Governor position, which is why the competition for Legal Officer was extremely fierce. However, Caesar, who had just reached the minimum age requirement to run for Legal Officer, was easily elected, proving how popular he was among the people of Rome.

Coincidentally, in that same year, Rome's High Priest passed away, leaving the position vacant.

During Sulla's rule, the power to appoint or remove the High Priest was given to the Senate, but this year, Labienus, who was closely associated with Caesar, proposed a bill that was passed to restore the old practice—namely, the position of High Priest being elected by the citizens.

Caesar was not content with just being a Legal Officer; he also wanted to run for High Priest and publicly announced his candidacy at the gathering.

The status of High Priest held high prestige and, in many respects, was considered one of the most important figures in Rome. Therefore, many influential figures and aristocrats actively competed for this position, including Catullus and Caesar's old supervisor in Cilicia, Isulicus.

Compared to these seasoned Elders, Caesar was still quite young, and no one expected him to succeed.

But during the campaign, Caesar, like the other candidates, spent lavishly, offered gifts, supported others, and sought the key figures of each tribe, and his prospects improved steadily.

Catullus felt the pressure and proactively offered: If Caesar withdraws from the election, he would give him a significant amount of money.

Indeed, Caesar was now heavily in debt. If he failed, he would likely be pushed to the brink of suicide by his creditors.

Deeply in debt, Caesar remained unfazed and instead borrowed more money, courting more tribes, with his main creditor still being Crassus.

For Caesar, this was a high-stakes gamble; he could only succeed and not fail.

On the day of the election, Caesar kissed his mother goodbye and solemnly told her: He would either return as High Priest or never return at all!

In the end, he succeeded!

Considering the strength of his opponents, this victory was quite remarkable, making him the new star dazzling on Rome's political scene!

Although the High Priest had no authority to command other priests, as the majority vote of the priesthood could overturn the opinion of the High Priest, the High Priest played a central role in many aspects of Rome's religion and rituals, elevating Caesar's prestige and reputation significantly among the people of Rome.

In addition, as High Priest, he also acquired a residence at the eastern end of the Roman Square, just a stone's throw from the Senate, further facilitating his maneuvering in the political arena.

While the surprising results of the High Priest election drew attention, Rome's citizens were more concerned with the year's end Governor election, where Catiline was making his final attempts.

He knew his chances of winning this time were slim, so he decided to take a different approach, striving to portray himself as a defender of the poor, and openly declared: There are two republics in Rome. One consists of the vast majority, powerful yet headless; the other is that of his opponents, all head and no body, as they lack genuine support from the people. He aimed to become the leader that the vast majority urgently needed.

Thus, many poor people rallied to him, including several displaced Sulla veterans, who marched through Rome several times to express their support for Catiline.

Catiline made a significant impact in Rome, even attracting some young Roman nobles to oppose their families, causing many of the Senate's Elders to turn unfriendly towards him.

On election day, to prevent any disturbances, Cicero, who supervised the election, even donned armor and led a guard to maintain the order of the election.

Ultimately, Catiline failed.

Among the two elected Governors was one named Silanuus, whose political career was lackluster, not even as well-known as his wife among the populace.

Silanuus' wife, Sevilla, was Caesar's most important lover. Their intimate relationship endured for a long time, which was rare for the pleasure-loving Caesar, not because Sevilla was stunningly beautiful, but because she was smart, well-read, ambitious, and intellectually well-matched with Caesar, making her an excellent companion on his political path.

Even though Catiline lost the election, his debts were soon to mature, yet he seemed calm and continued attending Senate meetings.

However, his followers were busy recruiting troops in the Northern Italy region.

Cicero closely monitored Catiline and received intelligence: Catiline was planning an uprising.

But due to the lack of concrete evidence and Catiline making no unusual moves, Cicero's warnings did not prompt the Senate to take any effective actions.

Until one day, a stack of letters was suddenly delivered to Cicero's house, describing "Catiline's plan to revolt and slaughter Rome's eminent nobility," and the person forwarding these accusations was none other than Crassus, who once supported Catiline.

The next day, after Cicero read the letters aloud in the Senate, Rome entered a state of emergency, with Governor Cicero being given full powers to handle the crisis.

Cicero mobilized the army to suppress any possible uprisings while convening a Senate meeting where he publicly denounced Catiline.

That night, Catiline fled Rome, claiming he chose voluntary exile to prevent internal strife within the republic.

Chapter 517: The Fall of Pannonia

But soon, people discovered that Catiline had not fled abroad but had instead joined forces with his trusted ally Manlius and his assembled army.

The fact of Catiline's rebellion was unequivocal, and he, along with Manlius, was declared a public enemy of Rome by the Senate.

Given that many of Catiline's supporters were still stirring up trouble inside Rome, the Senate convened an emergency meeting, tasking Cicero to identify the leaders of Catiline's conspiratorial group and have them arrested.

As one conspirator after another was apprehended, including a former governor who was an Elder, the atmosphere in Rome grew tense. The Elders began to suspect one another and conducted themselves with extraordinary caution.

One of the arrested conspirators was brought to the Senate and claimed he had previously been sent by Crassus to inform Catiline. Since Crassus had publicly supported Catiline's bid for governor twice, the accusation plunged Crassus into peril.

However, many Elders owed debts to Crassus and loudly proclaimed that this was a slander against him. Others believed it was in the best interest of Rome during this crisis to win over such a powerful figure like Crassus rather than alienate him. Thus, the Elders voted to declare Crassus innocent.

Caesar, who had also supported Catiline's gubernatorial campaign, faced allegations as well, instigated by Catullus, who still bore a grudge against Caesar for defeating him in the election for High Priest.

But Cicero refused to arrest Caesar, perhaps due to their friendly relationship or because he did not want to drive Caesar—who held immense respect among Roman citizens—into the arms of the rebels, creating an irreparable situation. Therefore, Cicero expressed belief in Caesar's loyalty to the republic.

Ultimately, five key conspirators closely tied to Catiline, including two well-known Elders, were arrested.

The Senate convened a meeting at the Temple of Harmony, presided over by Cicero, to discuss how to deal with the criminals.

Some Elders advocated for execution, while others quietly agreed. Crassus was absent, and Caesar, the Legal Officer-elect, offered a unique perspective, arguing that the death penalty was contrary to Roman customs and suggesting lifetime imprisonment instead.

Cato harshly criticized Caesar's proposal, insisting on execution with resolute determination.

In the end, most Elders sided with Cato, prioritizing Rome's safety over individual citizens' rights.

Thus, Cicero carried out the execution by strangling the five prisoners. When he announced the outcome of the death sentences to the public, the majority of the citizens cheered thunderously, with some even hailing him as Rome's savior.

This outsider from the small town of Albium could hardly have dreamed of achieving such a glorious day.

Order returned to Rome, but the danger was not yet eliminated. Catiline and his followers were inciting rebellion in the north, threatening Rome's security.

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In the first half of 63 BC (the ninth year since the establishment of the Nix Tribe), things remained relatively tranquil within the tribe, but considering the tense situation in the north, the Nix people intensified efforts to assimilate newly conquered territories.

After the autumn harvest, disaster struck—the Boyi launched a large-scale invasion of the southern bank of the Delaware River. After fierce battles, they broke through the defenses of the Pannonian Tribes' allied army, flooding into the south bank's lands.

Envoys from the three main Pannonian Tribes rushed to the Nix Tribe, requesting assistance from Maximus: if the Nix would send troops to help drive back the Boyi army and return them to the north bank, the three Pannonian Tribes were willing to pledge allegiance to the Nix Tribe, follow Maximus, and obey his commands.

Maximus responded, stating that unless the Pannonians joined the Nix Tribe, he could not convince his tribesmen to risk their lives for their former enemies against the powerful Boyi.

The Pannonian Great Chiefs naturally could not agree to such an unreasonable demand, so the envoys departed without success. Meanwhile, the situation for the Pannonians continued to deteriorate rapidly...

After securing their foothold on the southern bank of the Delaware River, the Boyi pressed further south, and through another fierce battle, they crushed the fullest efforts of the Pannonians' three tribal allied armies, splitting their territories in two and making collaboration impossible.

Clearly, the Boyi army also pushed closer to Nix Tribe territory in the newly occupied former Mazi domain. However, rather than wasting time and effort advancing into the mountains, the Boyi divided their forces into two groups, striking east and west.

The Pannonians could no longer mount effective resistance, and their panicked populace fled, all heading toward the same destination—Nix territory.

Maximus welcomed them without hesitation, ordering his subordinates to accept and properly resettle these refugees.

The Nix Tribe's actions eased the fears of the Pannonian populace, prompting even more Pannonians to rush toward Nix territory, including Perustai Great Chief Pagiras.

Perustai was located at the center of the three main Pannonian Tribes in the north and was the focal point of the Boyi's river-crossing invasion. Pagiras organized allied forces twice for desperate resistance, but both attempts ended in failure. The Boyi pressed their attack, preventing Pagiras from gathering his scattered soldiers before retreating to his main camp, which was swiftly encircled by Boyi cavalry. He fled southward in haste to the eastern Disone main camp to seek aid from Demikas.

Demikas, struggling to protect himself, had no reinforcements to offer.

The nearly hopeless Pagiras could only follow his fleeing tribesmen into the former Andizeti territory, urgently seeking an audience with Maximus.

Upon meeting Maximus, he tearfully implored: if the Nix Tribe was willing to send troops to drive back the Boyi army and rescue the Perustai tribesmen from danger, the Perustai Tribe would agree to become part of the Nix Tribe, per Maximus's terms.

After reaching an agreement, despite the severe nature of the situation, Maximus—who had commenced military mobilization over a month prior—did not immediately deploy his forces. Instead, he first sent Scepter Priest Emmerich to convince Druid Bodamochi of the Norik Tribe to join him in visiting the Boyi army. They met with the Boyi King and Great Druid.

Citing that "Perustai is now part of Nix territory," they sought to persuade him to retreat and return to the north bank.

To give up the spoils already at hand was unthinkable. The Boyi King ignored Emmerich and Bodamochi's shared Celtic and Druid identities, berating them as shameless and threatening: once the Pannonians were eradicated, it would be the Nix's turn.

Bodamochi, originally intending only to repay a favor to the Nix Tribe and take symbolic action, was inwardly enraged by the Boyi King's insults. Consequently, during the ensuing battle, he convinced his tribe to side with the Nix Tribe, providing further iron ore supplies.

Meanwhile, Emmerich returned to the tribe, exaggerating the Boyi King's words to the tribesmen, instantly provoking the anger of the Nix people and stirring fervent calls for war.

Maximus responded to the sentiments of his tribesmen, declaring war on the Boyi in January of 62 BC (the eleventh year since the founding of the Nix Tribe) and swiftly led his assembled two legions and cavalry westward.

At this time, the Boyi army on the southern bank of the Delaware River had been divided into three groups: one sweeping the territories of the Desitia Tribe in the west, another besieging the Disone main camp in the east, and a smaller force occupying the Perustai lands.

The Boyi King had anticipated the Nix Tribe's interference but never imagined they would arrive so swiftly or with such a sizable army.

In haste, he assembled an eastern force of fewer than ten thousand soldiers to confront the enemy.

The battle-hardened Nix Infantry caught the Boyi King by surprise, and the Boyi cavalry, though numerous, suffered heavy losses during their charge due to volleys of crossbow arrows fired from behind Nix Cavalry units.

The Boyi army suffered a crushing defeat, forcing the Boyi King to lead his remaining troops back into Disone territory, urgently summoning the western force for reinforcements and sending envoys back to the north bank to request aid from tribal allies.

Before reinforcements could arrive, the Boyi King looked out to see the vast Nix fleet now occupying the Delaware River.

Unlike the newly independent Pannonians, who had only been established for a little over a decade, the Boyi had lived on this Great River Plain for over a century and maintained a sizable fleet. Without such naval strength, they would have been unable to evacuate their people from the eastern bank of the Danube after losing to the Dacians, nor transport warriors across the Delaware River to defeat the Pannonians.

Upon spotting the Nix fleet, the Boyi vessels stationed on the northern bank—responsible for transporting supplies and injured combatants—quickly set sail to confront them.

The first large-scale naval battle in the history of the Nix Tribe was about to unfold.

The ships on both sides were mostly of the same canoe-like design. However, the majority of Nix vessels were covered, while the Boyi warships were not.

Covered ships appeared less nimble, but with more than four hundred vessels crowding the less-than-two-hundred-meter-wide Delaware River, the Boyi's fleet could not display their agility. Instead, both sides resorted to close-quarters combat, primarily boarding maneuvers.

Ironically, the covered decks on Nix ships made boarding more difficult, and each vessel was equipped with crossbowmen who often managed to injure or kill the crew on Boyi ships before they could even approach.

The Nix fleet achieved a massive victory in this battle, capturing or destroying nearly all Boyi vessels. With the Delaware River now under the control of the Nix Navy, the Boyi troops stationed on the southern bank were cut off from retreat, becoming trapped and isolated.

Maximus seized the opportunity to lead his army in an assault.

The Boyi King fought desperately but ultimately suffered a devastating defeat, falling into captivity himself.

By this time, the three Pannonian Tribes' territories, trampled by the Boyi forces, were left with displaced peoples everywhere. Having endured tremendous hardship, these Pannonian refugees despised their own leaders' incompetence, admired the strength of the Nix Tribe, and were swayed by the stories spread by numerous Nix reserve tribesmen extolling the benefits of joining the Nix Tribe. Consequently, the Pannonian populace began to join the Nix Tribe en masse.

Unlike the lengthy and demanding process of conquering the Segestica Territory, this time Maximus, after thoroughly defeating the Boyi army on the southern bank, encountered no further resistance and effortlessly absorbed the territories and people of the three Pannonian Tribes.

Thus, the Pannonian Tribes perished.

Chapter 518: Caesar Wears a Green Hat

In May, the Boyi people sent envoys to negotiate peace with the Nix tribe and requested the release of all Boyi captives.

Maximus was willing to negotiate and also to release the Boi King but refused to release other Boyi captives because the Nix tribe had acquired large tracts of land and urgently needed labor.

Seeing that Maximus was unwavering and didn't even demand the return of their king, the Boyi envoys stopped the negotiations, gave some harsh words, and returned to the north bank.

Since the Nix Fleet patrolled the Delaware River day and night, Maximus was not worried about the safety of the south bank territory. He led various officials in governing the new territory...

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Faced with Catiline's powerful rebellion in the Etruria region north of Rome, most of the Elders were fearful, especially upon learning that many Sulla veterans had joined the rebels. They were increasingly worried about the resurgence of civil war in Rome, so some proposed in the Senate meeting to recall Pompey, who was fighting in the East, to quell Catiline's rebellion.

Cato was furious about this, declaring that he would rather die than see Pompey appointed as Commander of the Italians.

Cicero was also firmly opposed to the proposal. In his youth, he had regarded Pompey as a hero of Rome, but now, having reached a high position in politics, he was unwilling to see Pompey achieve one triumph after another on the battlefield and gain immense prestige among the people, thus threatening the security of the Roman Republican System.

In the end, he convinced the Senate not to recall Pompey, but to actively prepare and train the army.

It turned out that although Catiline caused a lot of trouble in the northwest of Rome, his hastily assembled army was complicated and lacked training; they were consistently defeated by the well-organized and numerous Roman Army. Finally, in the Battle of Pistoria, they were thoroughly crushed, and Catiline himself died in battle, causing almost no substantive danger to Rome, far from being comparable to Spartacus' rebellion army.

Nonetheless, many of the Elders in Rome were still panicked and staged tactical retreats from Rome during the war.

For example, Hibrida, who had just stepped down as Governor, should have been one of the commanders tasked with quelling the rebellion, yet he pretended to be ill and did not go on the campaign. Later, he hurried to Macedonia to assume office, focusing on amassing wealth and staying low-key otherwise.

Most Elders kept a low profile, except for Caesar, who was always the most high-profile member of the Senate.

In 62 BC, he officially became Legal Officer. As soon as he took office, he began to attack Catullus to retaliate against him for nearly framing Caesar during the Catiline incident.

The Jupiter Temple in Rome had been destroyed by fire ten years ago; during his tenure as Governor, Catullus was tasked with its restoration, but it was still incomplete. So, the Legal Officer, Caesar, summoned Catullus to a Citizens' Assembly at the Roman Square, accusing him of embezzling the funds allocated by the Senate for the construction and demanding an explanation.

He forced Catullus not to speak from the platform but to make his statement on the lower ground level, thus humiliating the Chief Elder.

He even suggested transferring the temple restoration task to someone else. Eventually, due to the arrival of many of Catullus' supporters at the assembly, he was unsuccessful.

However, winning wasn't Caesar's main goal; he was more interested in making a public appearance and demonstrating his concern for Rome's public affairs.

Caesar was also one of the Elders who actively demanded the recall of Pompey to suppress the rebellion, but he was still unsuccessful. However, his enthusiastic support for this great hero won public favor and Pompey's goodwill.

Caesar not only praised and supported Pompey openly, basking in reflected glory to enhance his own reputation, but also, during Pompey's overseas expedition, shared Pompey's wife Mutia.

But he did not expect the retaliation to come so quickly. At the end of this year, he was involved in an adultery scandal, where he was innocent.

Caesar's High Priest residence was chosen as the site for the Festival of the Good Goddess that year. Since the ceremony was conducted entirely by women, according to custom, no men were allowed to be present.

However, the next Financial Officer, the handsome Claudius, disguised himself as a woman, sneaked into the venue, and had a tryst with Caesar's wife Pompeia, which was discovered, causing a great scandal.

As Legal Officer, Caesar could have charged Claudius with sacrilege but didn't want to escalate the matter or offend the well-connected Claudius, so he refrained from testifying in court, allowing Claudius to pass smoothly.

In the end, he divorced Pompeia with the excuse that "Caesar's wife must be above suspicion."

In reality, Caesar and Pompeia were never as close as he was with Cornelia, his first wife. Since their marriage, Caesar spent too much time with Sevilla and other mistresses, leaving Pompeia childless, and the household was dominated by the mother-in-law Aurelia, so Pompeia's resentment and infidelity were understandable.

Of course, Claudius's charm cannot be ignored; he was intelligent, handsome, very seductive, and like Caesar, enjoyed seducing other men's wives and was quite the philanderer.

In any case, this matter became a hot topic among the Roman populace.

Caught in the turmoil, Caesar had to hastily resign as Legal Officer and head to Spain.

According to Roman law, a Legal Officer after stepping down could assume the position of Provincial Governor, and the Senate assigned Caesar the province of Spain.

Caesar had worked in Spain for a year as Financial Officer, and his first tenure as Provincial Governor was in familiar Spain— isn't it a coincidence?

Of course not, the influential Caesar in the Senate now had the ability to choose his desired location.

However, he almost didn't make it because some creditors prevented him from leaving, demanding he repay his debt first.

Caesar sought help from Crassus.

Despite being a creditor himself, Crassus, who had a close relationship with Caesar, unhesitatingly provided 830 talents as a bond, allowing Caesar to proceed smoothly to his position in Spain.

In 61 BC, the twelfth year of the establishment of the Nix tribe, Caesar began fulfilling his duties as Provincial Governor.

For the Elders, the province of Spain was not an ideal place, as there were too many Barbarians. Plunder and robbery were their way of life, and the region was scarred from years of war suppressing Sedulius, and banditry was rampant.

Some Elders were glad to see Caesar take office as governor of Spain and gloatingly anticipated him making a fool of himself there. They believed Caesar was adept at stirring trouble in Rome, but with his penchant for affairs with women, he might show his true colors facing the fierce Barbarians.

But as soon as Caesar arrived in Spain, he immediately recruited ten new units, increasing the existing garrison by half, then began to campaign against the Celtic Tribes who refused to submit to Rome, achieving repeated victories. His military talent was initially showcased, and he was praised by the people of the province as a "Triumphal General."

However, his success in Spain did not create a great sensation in Rome because all the Romans' attention was drawn to another major event—Pompey had returned.

Lucullus was not wrong; he had already shattered the power of the Paphlagonia Kingdom. Pompey was just a carrion bird, coming to pick up the spoils.

Indeed, when Pompey took over Lucullus's command and, with a larger army, decisively crushed the forces of Mithridates, easily subjugating Tigranes, he could not be content with only these accomplishments.

In the ensuing years, he seized every opportunity to command his troops to march to places no Roman army had ventured before: conquering north to the Caucasus, south to Syria, besieging Jerusalem... except for the formidable Parthian Empire and desert territories, the entire Eastern Mediterranean forces were brought under Roman control by him.

He also spent considerable time establishing provincial administration in these newly occupied territories, formulating many regulations to ensure peace in this vast Eastern region.

Thus, when he returned to Rome in the summer of 61 BC, the entire city of Rome was astir.

During his third Triumph, though Pompey, who had grown several years older, no longer had the absurd idea of riding an elephant chariot, his vanity remained unchanged. He specifically arranged for large placards to be carried in his parade, clearly stating: he defeated and captured millions of enemies, seized and sank nearly a thousand warships, accepted the surrender of over a thousand towns or strongholds...

His parade included hundreds of noble prisoners from the East, countless gold and silver treasures, and over a hundred floats marked with each kingdom or race he had defeated... while he himself rode in a chariot adorned with jewels, wearing a cloak reputed to have been worn by Alexander the Great.

Indeed, Pompey's brilliant achievements overshadowed those of past great Roman generals, comparable to that young conqueror of the East, Alexander the Great.

Upon returning to Rome, Pompey's first action was to divorce his promiscuous wife Mutia, then to approach Cato, expressing his hope to marry his niece, Caesar's mistress Sevilla's daughter. He also intended, on behalf of his son, to propose marriage to another daughter of Sevilla.

This was Pompey's gesture of goodwill to the Conservative members of the Senate, aiming to ease his strained relations with them because he knew these people harbored resentment against him during the years he was away at war.

Why seek Cato's hand in marriage? Because the elderly Catullus had passed away, and the young, combative, uncompromising, and noble-born Cato had become the pillar for the Conservatives.

Cato firmly rejected Pompey's marriage proposal, which increased his prestige, showing the Conservative Elders that he valued morality over political benefits, making them rely on him even more.

Pompey's proposal failed, and he subsequently faced setbacks in the political arena.

Chapter 519: Roman Governor Caesar

Initially, Pompey's bill to "distribute land to the veterans who served under his command in the war in Spain" received approval, yet it was never implemented. This time, when Pompey revisited the issue, the elders claimed there wasn't enough land for distribution, making execution impossible.

Moreover, Pompey enacted several laws during his conquest of the East to stabilize the newly occupied territories. Although his legislative work was commendably completed, he wasn't granted legislative power and acted first and reported later, attracting criticism from the Senate.

Lucullus, who had his command taken by Pompey, finally found an opportunity for revenge. He, along with Cato, Metellus (Mutia's half-brother) and some other conservative elders, discussed and handled each of Pompey's regulations for the East individually.

Pompey, who once dominated the battlefield, found himself struggling upon his return to Rome, feeling like he was stuck in a quagmire.

He attempted to become part of the elite inner circle within the Senate to improve his dire situation but was collectively excluded by the elders led by Lucullus and Cato, as they viewed Pompey, with his high prestige and popular following, as a threat to the Roman Republic.

Pompey's former adversary, Crassus, was also facing difficulties, as the elders opposing Pompey were equally eager to thwart Crassus's endeavors.

Particularly Cato, the moral paragon of the Senate, despised Crassus, who preferred skulking around with clandestine tricks but lacked the courage to confront direct accusations. Thus, he repeatedly obstructed Crassus in the Senate, especially vehemently opposing the tax collectors' demands, causing Crassus substantial financial losses in his ventures.

In the summer of 60 BC (the thirteenth year of the Nix Tribe's establishment), Caesar returned from his governorship in Spain. He was then forty, eligible to run for the consul election the following year.

He also applied to the Senate for a Triumph, capitalizing on his outstanding military accomplishments in Spain.

Caesar sought to leverage the triumphal parade and celebrations to boost his chances in the elections.

His plans were grand, but now his adversary in the Senate was no longer the aging and clumsy Catullus but the shrewd and stubborn Cato.

Through Cato's manipulation, Caesar's application for a Triumph was approved, but the date was set after a meeting in the Roman Square that the consul candidates were required to attend in person.

According to Roman tradition, Caesar could not cross the sacred boundary of Rome before hosting a Triumph, making him ineligible to attend the meeting, thus disqualifying him from candidacy.

Consequently, Caesar requested the Senate to relocate the meeting for consul candidates to a temple outside the sacred boundary of Rome. Still, Cato filibustered from morning till night at the Senate meeting, so Caesar's request couldn't be discussed and had to wait for the next regular Senate meeting.

But time was tight, and although a triumph was the utmost glory for a Roman citizen and family—most Romans would never experience such honor in their lifetime, and hosting three triumphs like Pompey was exceedingly rare—Caesar's desire for a Triumph was strong. However, more acutely than Pompey, he understood the essence of power, and when faced with the choice between the Triumph and the consul election, he resolutely abandoned the Triumph, entering the city to participate in the consul election.

Caesar's return to Rome revitalized Pompey and Crassus, who were under pressure from the elite group of the Roman Senate, caught in dire straits.

Pompey would not forget how Caesar had supported him with enthusiasm over the years, nor would Crassus forget Caesar's close cooperation with him in the Senate in recent years, providing significant assistance in Caesar's consul campaign.

Cato and the conservative elders did not expect Caesar to forgo the Triumph to run for consul, hastily taking remedial measures, promoting a candidate to oppose Caesar.

Their choice was Cato's son-in-law—Marcus Bibulus.

This man had some connections to Caesar; they had simultaneously served as municipal officers and as legal officers, with Caesar overshadowing him each time. Now, they were both running for consul again.

Caesar had no doubt he would be elected, not only because of his substantial influence among the Roman public but also due to the support he received from Pompey and Crassus, with connections,

funds, ensuring that as long as he registered, his consulship the following year was practically guaranteed. This certainty is why he dared to relinquish the Triumph; before entering the city, he had already seen the Roman political situation clearly.

Indeed, on election day, Caesar effortlessly took the lead, with Bibulus, supported by numerous elders, coming in second.

The two consuls for the next year were thus determined.

Caesar finally reached the highest administrative office in Rome at forty, but he quickly encountered trouble.

Cato didn't want to see his old rival sailing smoothly in politics, so he proposed in a Senate meeting that given the years of inflicted wounds to the rural areas of Italy due to wars and other factors, the next two consuls should first be dispatched to manage Italy's woodlands and country paths after their terms ended.

This proposal was approved.

This proposal was evidently targeted at Caesar, as by convention, consuls were to be dispatched as provincial governors after their terms, and inability to govern a province and acquire wealth would likely lead creditors to drive Caesar bankrupt.

Though Caesar was angry, he didn't show it, secretly preparing to unite with Pompey and Crassus to confront the conservative faction in the Senate.

Even though Caesar had cuckolded both Pompey and Crassus, making them somewhat resentful, the setbacks they experienced over the past years made them realize their wealth and influence were insufficient to obtain all they desired. They needed a talented, resolute consul of Caesar's caliber to handle affairs, proving Caesar the most suitable through his past performances.

Animosity between Pompey and Crassus had lasted for years, making reconciliation challenging. Nevertheless, Caesar invested tremendous effort to persuade them, mostly through correspondence to avoid drawing attention.

Facing a common enemy and shared interests eventually brought these three together.

Of course, among them, Caesar was the weakest and hence the junior partner, a tool for the other two, expected to work for their benefits during his consulship.

On January 1, 59 BC (the fourteenth year of the Nix Tribe's establishment), Caesar and Bibulus officially took office.

As the candidate with the most votes during the election, Caesar gained priority and, at the Senate meeting on the second day, immediately proposed a new Land Bill.

Yet, as discussions began, his old adversary Cato once again deployed his rhetorical prowess, speaking eloquently for several hours, wasting the entire day, preventing the Senate from voting on the Land Bill.

Cato thought he had won, but he forgot his opponent was Caesar.

Caesar publicly announced that since the Senate was unwilling to act, he would directly appeal to the people of Rome.

The next day, Caesar convened a meeting at the square, in front of thousands of citizens, inquiring Bibulus's views on the Land Bill.

Bibulus stubbornly shouted, "This year's bill will not pass, even if all of you want it!"

Bibulus's words mirrored the stance of Cato and the other elders; they were determined to obstruct the Land Bill, yet Caesar and his backers were equally uncompromising.

Soon after, Caesar held another citizens' assembly at the square. This time he didn't invite his colleague Bibulus but brought in Pompey and Crassus, marking their first public display of unity.

Caesar asked them to stand on the platform as he read out each clause of the Land Bill, asking Pompey beside him, "What do you think?"

Poor at public speeches, Pompey found his chance to shine, and each time he said "I agree!" the crowd erupted in cheers.

The fervent atmosphere roused Pompey, so when Caesar asked, "What if someone opposes the bill with a sword?" he passionately replied, "I will take up the sword and shield, prepared for battle!"

Crassus also voiced his support for the Land Bill, delighting the crowd and stirring unease among many elders.

Yet, despite the people's clamor, Cato and his allies stubbornly prevented the Land Bill from passing in the Senate.

Thus, Caesar appealed to the citizens, leading to the decision to hold a tribal assembly vote on the Land Bill on the last day of January.

When the day came, Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus's supporters occupied key points around the square, including some veterans from Pompey's army, even armed.

As Bibulus attempted to speak against Caesar's Land Bill, he was pushed off the podium, his law enforcer's fascist bundle smashed, and a basket of dung was dumped on his head.

The venue experienced some unrest, with Cato and others forced to leave. Although some were injured, none were killed, as Caesar and his allies maintained effective control over the violence.

The Citizens' Assembly then officially began, approving the Land Bill by a majority vote.

Humiliated, Brullus was profoundly impacted, remaining absent from public appearances for the rest of his term and resorting to underhanded tactics in opposing Caesar.

This had little effect on Caesar, who, after implementing the Land Bill favoring Pompey, called a tribal assembly for the final ratification of his Eastern legislation.

Chapter 520: The Mission of Onomabatis

During a meeting to discuss this matter, Lucullus spoke out to attack Caesar.

Caesar, undeterred, launched into an extremely fiery and lengthy tirade against him, terrifying the seasoned, sardine-like Elder to the point of delirium, and ultimately causing him to prostrate himself on the ground, begging for mercy.

Lucullus's feeble display marked the withdrawal of the group of individuals from the Sula era, who had occupied high positions in the Senate, from the center stage of Roman politics.

Pompey's Eastern Law was passed, and soon after Crassus achieved his objective with Caesar's help—reducing by a third the fixed amount of taxes the tax collectors in Asia were required to pay into the state treasury.

Of course, while serving Pompey and Crassus, Caesar did not forget to pursue his own ambitions, embedding provisions in these passed proposals intended to address Rome's maladies.

However, Caesar was acutely aware that although he had become Governor, his power was still relatively weak and he couldn't change Rome's current state on his own. He could only rely on Pompey and Crassus's protection for now to make minor amendments.

In addition to legislative activities, Caesar undertook another significant task—arranging marriage alliances.

At this time, both he and Pompey were divorced. To solidify his alliance with Pompey, Caesar married off his only daughter to him.

Julia was young and beautiful, intelligent and refined, inheriting much of her father's charm, which pleased Pompey to no end.

Meanwhile, Caesar himself married Calpurnia, whose father, Lucius Calpurnius Piso, was highly likely to be elected as the Governor next year—a crucial ally whom Caesar needed to protect his interests.

Having completed these marriage alliances, Caesar still had another major decision—determining his posting after stepping down as Governor.

He would certainly not acquiesce to Cato's wishes to oversee Italy's countryside and minor roads. Such an unprofitable position would neither solve his immense debt problems nor fulfill his ambitious goals.

He turned his attention to Northern Italy. After Rome had stabilized the regions surrounding the Mediterranean, places still ripe for potential conflict dwindled. Caesar, well aware of the dual rewards of war—wealth and power—set his sights there.

Thus, Valgius, a People's Guardian closely aligned with Caesar, proposed a motion in the Senate: granting Caesar a special five-year command after his term as Governor, merging the Western Fa Province and Northern Italy Province for his governance, along with autonomy in selecting his Legion Commanders...

Though some Elders expressed opposition, with the support of Pompey and Crassus, the proposal was passed.

Soon afterward, it happened that the current governor of the Illyria Province, Metellus, passed away due to illness. The Senate then voted again to expand Caesar's jurisdiction to include Illyria as well.

A five-year term, a robust military force, and the opportunity to make a name for himself across Northern Italy and the Balkan Peninsula... These were precisely what Caesar desired.

That year, Caesar played the loyal subordinate, charging ahead for Pompey and Crassus, fulfilling all their needs, and naturally reaping generous rewards in return.

In 58 BC (the fifteenth year since the establishment of the Nix Tribe), Caesar, high-spirited, departed for the Northern Italy Province.

He was not alone; accompanying him was an entourage of staff members.

Among this group were many individuals whom Caesar intended to appoint as Legion Commanders: Labienus, who had previously served as a People's Guardian and had collaborated closely with Caesar—Caesar repaid the favor by granting him independent senior Legal Officer authority in the province; Valgus, the former People's Guardian who had rendered great merit in securing Caesar's appointment; Caesar's old acquaintances Balbus and Mamula... alongside the younger Publius Crassus, the youngest son of Rome's wealthiest man, Crassus, and another young man, Brutus.

What stood out about Caesar's proposed Legion Commander candidates was: except for Crassus and Brutus, hailing from prominent aristocratic families whose fathers had served as Governors, the rest had held no higher office than People's Guardian. Their families had been devoid of notable figures for generations, and they lacked war experience—an undeniable contrast to the elite Legion Commanders under Pompey's command.

Members of Rome's aristocratic families were reluctant to serve under Caesar, as—so far—few believed Caesar would become a great Commander. Some even speculated he might perish in his conflict with the Gaul Barbarians.

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The Boyi people originally inhabited the Po River Plain. They had repeatedly joined other Celtic Tribes in marching south to threaten Rome's security, but as Rome grew stronger, it retaliated by sending armies northward.

Witnessing their neighboring tribes obliterated one by one by Rome, the Boyi people were forced to migrate their entire tribe for survival. After enduring countless hardships, they reached the plains west of the Danube River's western bank.

This area had already been settled by other Celtic Tribes, and for the Boyi people to establish themselves, they had to contend with the original inhabitants for land.

Under such challenging circumstances, the Boyi people were compelled to break from tradition and elect a king for their tribe. This king possessed substantial authority, overseeing military, diplomatic, and inter-tribal affairs, except for religious ceremonies, which remained under the purview of the Druids.

This consolidation brought together the Boyi's various branches and unleashed a formidable power, enabling them to conquer other tribes and become the most dominant force on the western plains of the Danube River.

However, the title of Boyi King was not hereditary. If the king fell ill or committed major mistakes that incurred the dissatisfaction of the tribal leaders, these leaders would appeal to the Druid Priesthood to convene a tribal assembly to elect a new king of moral and leadership excellence from among the leaders.

Thus, after negotiations with the Nix Tribe failed, the Boyi people decisively ousted their king, who had led the tribe to a crushing defeat and captivity, and elected a new king.

The newly elected Boyi King promised his people: he would spare no effort in defeating the Nix people and rescuing their captured comrades!

This meant that the conflict between the Boyi and Nix Tribes would persist. However, due to the dominance of the Nix Navy, which controlled the entire Delaware River, the Boyi people could not dispatch large forces across the river for combat, and small-scale infiltration efforts served merely as harassment, often with limited success and frequent loss.

Consequently, the two tribes rarely clashed on land but engaged in numerous naval battles, with the Boyi people suffering frequent defeats.

In contrast to the Boyi people's active aggression, the Nix Tribe appeared relatively subdued, focusing their efforts on integrating and absorbing their newly acquired territories.

In 60 BC (the thirteenth year since the establishment of the Nix Tribe), the Nix Tribe relocated their Main Camp once again. The new location was the former Main Camp of the Perustai Tribe, situated on the south bank of the Delaware River.

Maximus, unperturbed by the inconveniences of this move, made the decision for two reasons: first, to expedite and facilitate control over the former territories of Pannonia's three major tribes to the north; and second, to demonstrate to the tribespeople the Nix Tribe's determination to target the Boyi people in their next expansion.

In February of 58 BC (the fifteenth year since the establishment of the Nix Tribe), Maximus was handling tribal affairs in his main quarters when an attendant reported: "Leader, Onomabatis from the Commerce Department requests an audience."

Why has Onomabatis returned so quickly this time?... Thought Maximus to himself, "Let him in."

Onomabatis, an Illyrian, had formerly been part of the Karsipengpas Pirate Group. Later, when Pompey launched a military campaign to eradicate pirates throughout the Mediterranean, they were forced to retreat into the mountains. Under Karsipengpas's suggestion, they sought refuge with the Nix Tribe, becoming tribespeople and receiving land and homes—leading lives far more prosperous and stable than before.

Yet not all pirates adapted well to lives of early mornings, hard labor, and subsistence farming. Onomabatis, for instance, after more than a decade as a pirate, had long forgotten how to farm. Although the Agricultural Department sent personnel to teach farming techniques, he did not take them seriously. Moreover, with the Nix Tribe's territory expanding and population growing, the Foreign Auxiliary faced numerous public works projects—bridges, roads, dikes...—and could not spare manpower to aid ordinary tribespeople in cultivating their fields.

Although ordinary tribespeople of the Nix Tribe managed to hire laborers from the friendly Yapode, Alde, and Skodisqi Tribes for assistance in farming, the shortage of laborers persisted.

Onomabatis, after years of sea-faring life and broad exposure, recognized this issue within the Nix Tribe and boldly sought an audience with Maximus to propose his solution—venture out of the mountains to Italian towns to purchase slaves.

"Buying and trading slaves" was considered taboo in the Nix Tribe, as many high-ranking elder tribespeople had firsthand experience of its pain. However, Maximus did not share this sensitivity. On the contrary, he was quite pleased with Onomabatis's proposal and even convinced the Chief Officers at the Political Affairs Hall: "Our actions are not condoning cruelty; rather, we're liberating those slaves from their suffering."

Pirates, after hijacking vessels, would demand ransom or sell captives who failed to pay... Onomabatis had been responsible for such transactions during his piracy days. Though this would now entail "going from selling to buying," his expertise was undeniable. Maximus promptly promoted him to the Commerce Department, assigning him exclusively to the task of purchasing slaves, and provided him with several subordinates.

The Nix Tribe's paper currency was insufficient for external use. Fortunately, with the Tribe now producing increasingly diverse goods—cloth, pottery, wood carvings, furniture...—they could trade these items with nearby friendly tribes for various raw materials. Hence, a surplus of silver coins originally looted from Italy remained. Maximus entrusted Onomabatis with a portion of these gold-and-silver coins, sending him and his subordinates out, accompanied by a unit of Legion Soldiers serving as guards, disguised as a merchant caravan.